



Sean Anthony Cole is wanted on a Canada-wide warrant for robbery.

CRIME

Man wanted for violent robbery of woman, 94

Suspect in attack has lengthy criminal history

Vancouver police have identified a suspect in the violent robbery of a 94-year-old woman in the 600-block of Prior Street Nov. 12.

As the victim lay helpless on the sidewalk, the thief rifled through her clothing, searching for money and valuables.

The suspect ran off after a Good Samaritan came upon the scene, the Vancouver police department said in a release Tuesday.

Working from a description of the suspect's jacket, police have identified the alleged attacker as Sean Anthony Cole, a Vancouver resident.

A Canada-wide warrant for robbery has been issued for Cole, 45. He is described as black, 5-foot-nine and about 180 pounds, with a medium build. He has short black hair and may have facial hair and his upper arms have tattoos of barbed wire, the release said.

Cole has a lengthy criminal history of violence and property crimes dating back to the early 1980s.

He's considered to be dangerous and police are asking people to not approach him but to call 9-1-1 immediately if they see him.

Vancouver Sun

COURTS

Disgraced former VPD officer pleads guilty to drug trafficking

'Rogue cop' had less than five years on the force

BY NEAL HALL
VANCOUVER SUN

A disgraced former Vancouver police officer pleaded guilty Tuesday to drug trafficking and breach of trust.

Peter Andrew Hodson, 31, pleaded guilty to trafficking marijuana and two counts of breach of trust for selling drugs and the illegal use of a police database.

Another charge Hodson was facing — break-and-enter in connection with street drug trafficking — was stayed by the Crown.

The offences occurred between Dec. 4, 2009 and April 20, 2010.

Hodson, who remains on bail, will have a three-day sentencing hearing before Vancouver Provincial Court Judge Gregory Rideout starting June 1, when the Crown is expected to lead extensive evidence about the crimes.

Hodson, an officer for less than five years, was fired last April 21 after he was charged.

At the time, Vancouver Police Chief Jim Chu called the officer's conduct "shocking and disturbing," and branded Hodson as a "rogue" cop.

Hodson was also observed driving erratically by police on Nov. 16, 2008 and was charged with impaired driving. That matter will be back in court Dec. 16.

When the drug dealing allegations arose, police took the unusual step of setting up an investigation in an office outside the police station to protect the integrity of the probe.

Vancouver police also asked the RCMP for assistance. Police arranged for a drug user to buy drugs from Hodson.

The joint forces investigation, which involved up to 30 officers, observed Hodson trafficking amounts of two pounds or less of marijuana, both on and off duty.

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CRIME

Plan to smuggle cigarettes goes up in smoke

Seven face charges following seizure of almost \$5 million in contraband from container on ship

The plan to bring 10 million contraband cigarettes into Canada went up in smoke when RCMP busted what they say is the largest cigarette seizure in B.C.

Seven men, one Canadian and six Chinese, were arrested and are facing charges of smuggling and possessing unlawfully imported goods and improperly stamped tobacco after the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) seizure Oct. 29.

Officers with the CBSA were suspicious about a shipment aboard a container vessel and took a closer look. The documents that accompanied the container, originally from China, indicated it should have contained roofing nails, screw kits, cutting blades and other tools. But, when

officers X-rayed the shipment they discovered 51,000 cartons of undeclared cigarettes hidden inside the container.

Border services officers also thought the smuggled cigarettes may be counterfeit.

The RCMP said the cigarettes had a street value of \$4.9 million.

The men face up to five years in jail and fines of up to \$500,000 on each of the three charges.

This seizure is slightly larger than the previous record counterfeit cigarette bust that happened last April when authorities discovered a container in Vancouver with about 50,000 cartons of cigarettes.

Kim Pemberton, Vancouver Sun



CBSA Chief Colleen Pinvidic (left) and RCMP Const. Michael McLaughlin with contraband cigarettes from the seizure.

IAN SMITH/PNG

VANCOUVER

Some landowners using community gardens to get a tax break

Thriving urban vegetable patches affect the city's bottom line

BY JAMIE WILLIAMS

Where Alan Guy once saw beer bottles, crack pipes and litter, he now sees kale, tomatoes and spinach.

The Astoria Hotel parking lot at the corner of East Hastings Street and Hawks Avenue once played host to drug dealing and binge drinking. But community gardeners transformed it in autumn 2009 to the thriving urban farm SOLEfood.

They replaced the former addicts and loiterers, said Guy, who lives near the farm and is a SOLEfood employee.

"People used to come by and just use [the parking lot] to sell and smoke crack or get drunk," Guy said. "The farm is a positive thing, definitely a positive thing."

SOLEfood farm trains and employs 12 Downtown Eastside residents at wages up to \$12 per hour. It produces 10,000 pounds of vegetables and fruit a year, then sells it back at wholesale prices to the community through farmer's markets and at retail prices through local establishments such as The Potluck Cafe.

SOLEfood negotiated a deal with the Astoria Hotel to turn the lot into an urban farm. The arrangement resulted in a change of land use and property reassessment, which will determine a tax abatement that saves the owners thousands of dollars a year, according to BC Assessment.

Shirley Chan, the CEO of Building Opportunities with Business, a non-profit organization that helped establish the SOLEfood garden, said there should be more attention paid to how the city makes up the lost revenue.

"The tax benefit means that land owners save money, but the city has to collect [the lost revenue] from other taxpayers," Chan said.

The impetus for putting [community gardens] in place [is] to save some taxes. They usually roll out some grass, put out garden boxes, get involved in a situation there to get into a lower tax rate.

LYLE DUNN
SENIOR APPRAISER AT B.C. ASSESSMENT

B.C. Assessment values property based on various criteria, including usage. When a city lot with a hotel on it changes to a garden, its classification changes from "business or commercial" to "recreation or non-profit."

That lowers the tax rate from 18.6 per cent (of every \$1,000 of taxable value) to 6.1 per cent. Then B.C. Assessment reports to the city revenue services, which charges the property owner accordingly.

This process can lead to money grabs by developers called "land banking," said Andrew Yan, a Downtown Eastside urban planner with Bing Thom Architects who works with Vancouver city on economic stimulus projects.

Land banking occurs when owners put gardens on their property to receive a tax abatement. This usually lasts for one to two years, until the opportunity arises for them to sell or develop the lot, at which point the garden is closed down.

Andrew Pask, a city planner who deals directly with environmental initiatives for Vancouver, didn't know exactly how much money the city loses yearly due to these tax abatements.

"It is not a small amount of money, I'll grant," he said.

Other cases of urban gardens in

Vancouver highlight the issue.

Onni Developments' garden, which used to be at 1372 Seymour St., saved the company \$18,668 over the two years that it was in operation, according to Vancouver Revenue Services.

Prima Properties Limited's newly-developed Davie Village Community Garden on the corner of Davie and Burrard — prime real estate downtown — received \$212,740 in tax abatements in 2009, according to Vancouver Revenue Services.

Gardeners must pay a charge to lease a plot for a year in the Davie garden, but Prima Properties pays for all other associated costs, such as the set up of the garden, water usage, garbage removal and new garden soil each spring, said Scott Gibson, the garden liaison. The garden is in its second year of operation.

Lyle Dunn, a senior appraiser at B.C. Assessment, said eight private properties applied to be reassessed last year after owners changed the use of their property to include community

gardens similar to SOLEfood.

"The impetus for putting those in place [is] to save some taxes," said Dunn. "They usually roll out some grass, put out garden boxes, get involved in a situation there to get into a lower tax rate."

Yan said the city should support urban farming but said an honest discussion about tax abatements needs to happen.

"At what point is [urban farming] just rewarding those who are land banking versus using something that is actually underutilized?" Yan said.

Sean Dory, project manager of SOLEfood, said tax abatements for private landowners are necessary because of Vancouver's extremely high property values and because poor areas such as the Downtown Eastside benefit economically and socially from the urban farms.

"What we're trying to do here is create a social enterprise that supports itself," said Dory. "It wouldn't be possible to support itself at market value in the city."

Ken Vallee, a neighbourhood resident, said the garden changed his life — and the community's — for the better. Vallee is on social assistance, and SOLEfood put him through its horticulture program then hired him as a part-time worker.

"[The farm] does change people, it's true," he said. "It's really good. The people [who] live in the neighbourhood watch out for it."

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